

Famine in a “Failed” State: Strategies from and for Somalia

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This month, the President of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, declared a state of national disaster (Al Jazeera, 2017). Only ten days into his term, the President faced the reality that drought in the region has made famine in the country a near certainty over the coming months. Harsh weather conditions partly caused by El-Nino, a regular warming of the central to eastern Pacific, does not bode well for the livelihood of Somalis (UNOCHA, 2016). In particular, the drought has led to an increase in dehydration, starvation and consequently, death among the population and their livestock (BBC, 2017). Somalia, however, provides a unique case study for famine relief; a lack of a strong, centralized leadership in Somalia has led to its popular characterisation as a "failed-state" and more importantly, has led to concerns on how to combat famine in a deeply divided nation.

Within southern Somalia, February's election of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed has renewed hope of much-needed reforms within the state. So far, the government has responded to the drought with the introduction of an intra-governmental emergency committee to organize fundraising and registration for those at risk (New York Times, 2017). In tandem with the domestic response, "the president has appealed to the international community to urgently respond to the calamity" (Al Jazeera, 2017). Despite their interest in alleviating the effects of the drought, the ability of the government in Mogadishu to do so is limited by its reach. The presence of Al-Shabab controlled areas make a concentrated effort by the government in Mogadishu difficult.

In particular, the presence of Al-Shabab in south central Somalia means that humanitarian services that the region desperately needs are prevented from reaching those who need it. (Al Jazeera, 2017). The government of Puntland has responded by organizing a drought relief fund of \$1 million, collected both door to door and from the diaspora. (Al Jazeera, 2017). The culture of nomads throughout Somalia, however, means that despite government fundraising, they often cannot locate and therefore, effectively distribute these funds to some of the most vulnerable communities.

Although, the response and challenges of the government of Puntland do not appear unique to those of its southern counterpart in Mogadishu, Puntland's Environment Minister Ali Abdullahi Warsame differs with Mogadishu's President Mohamed on the nature of external famine relief. Warsame believes that international aid is not the way to overcome the recent challenges in Somalia. According to him, "The bulk of our response has been community led. The international support is a drop in the ocean. It never comes at the right time" (Al Jazeera, 2017).

In his remarks, Warsame may be touching on the increasing involvement of the Somali diaspora in famine relief. The community “unable to wait for help from their own governments or the international community...are turning to one another for support” (The Guardian, 2017). For example, the use of WhatsApp is becoming a popular method to coordinate funds, in order to

provide Somali families with basic need items. The diaspora's response "demonstrates the combination of "21st century social media with age-old clan networks" and represents a new mode of community-based support for Somalia (The Guardian, 2017). The method does, however, leave smaller clans with less members abroad largely at the mercy of international donor support (The Guardian, 2017).

On his visit to Somalia this month, Antonio Guterres, the United Nations secretary, offered support to President Mohamed's call for international aid. According to Guterres, "We need massive support from the international community to avoid a repetition of the the tragic events of 2011" (New York Times, 2017). The most recent famine in Somalia was in 2011; within about a two-month time frame, there were approximately 260,000 deaths (New York Times, 2017). To avoid repeating these figures this year, the UN migration agency is requesting \$24.6 million from international donors. (United Nations, 2017). Unlike Guterres, Stephen O'Brian, a UN Emergency Relief Coordinator believes that "only a political solution will ultimately end human suffering and bring stability to to the region... [relief-workers are] not the long-term solution to the growing crisis." (United Nations, 2017)

In the short term, the famine in Somalia needs to be met with a decisive response, regardless of who carries is out.

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